

# Radial head/neck fracture

You have or are likely to have sustained a fracture (break) to the radial head, a bone within the elbow. This is a very common injury. The good news is that these fractures heal well with time and use - no specific treatment is required and therefore routine follow-up is unnecessary. The only treatment is pain killers and a sling for comfort.



- It usually takes 6 weeks for the fracture to heal, but the stiffness in the elbow joint usually takes longer to recover, and physiotherapy is useful to help improve this. Function may continue to improve for up to 12 months. These are simple fractures that heal well so no referral to fracture clinic is needed. If you have sustained a more complex injury a fracture clinic referral is made.
- Physiotherapy can be arranged through your GP.
- A sling will hold your elbow in a comfortable position for a few days. You should wean yourself of this as your pain settles and aim to remove the sling completely as soon as you are able.
- **Do not** sleep in a sling or Collar and Cuff.
- You may initially require regular pain killers as it is important to keep gently moving the elbow and gradually resume daily activities within the limits of discomfort. This will prevent the risk of stiffness and ensure the quickest return to normal function.
- There is a risk that by forcibly stretching you may experience pain and delay your recovery.
- It may take 3-6 weeks for the bulk of the pain to settle.
- The function may continue to improve for up to 12 months from the date of fracture.
- There is a risk that you may experience slightly reduced movement at the elbow, especially on straightening it, but this is unlikely to affect your function.
- Smoking is known to delay healing and can prevent it all together. If possible, we would advise you to stop. Further advice can be found on the NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/> or from your GP.

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- It will not produce further damage if you continue to use your elbow for normal activities. It is likely to be sore in the early stages, but this should improve. Avoid sports and strenuous use.
- Should you not be improving after 6-8 weeks or you have any urgent concerns following discharge, please attend the Minor Injury Unit or the Accident and Emergency Department for a check-up.

## Exercises

We recommend starting to exercise the elbow as soon as you can in order to regain normal movement. The sling is a temporary measure, and you should try to wean from this over the next couple of weeks.

The following exercises are useful to speed recovery and we recommend you perform these at least 3-4 times per day. We suggest that the exercises are held for 5 seconds and repeated 10 times each.

### Elbow flexion and extension:

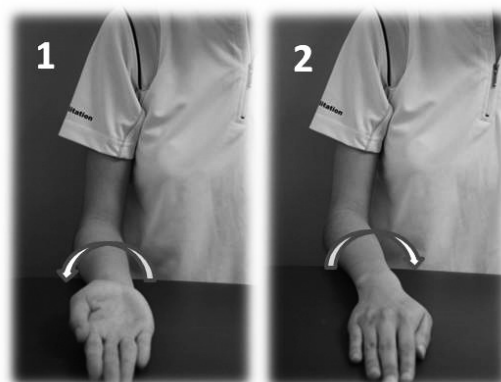
- Bend and straighten your elbow fully. Apply some added gentle pressure with your other hand to help the arm to bend fully and also to help the elbow straighten fully. Quite often initially you will struggle to fully straighten the elbow. This can take several weeks to months to fully recover.



### Supination/Pronation:

- Whilst sitting down, rest your forearm on a table with your elbows tucked in at your sides. With your palm facing down, turn your palms up to face upwards.

Please re-attend the Minor Injury Unit if you have any ongoing concerns regarding your Radial Head Fracture.



**Please contact your GP or NHS111 for any queries or concerns.**

**Please retain this leaflet for future reference.**

#### Reference:

Radial Head/Neck Leaflet, Orthopaedic Department,  
Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

If you would like this information in another format or language, please contact the Your Experience Team on freephone 0800 694 5530. Alternatively you can email [wcnt.yourexperience@nhs.net](mailto:wcnt.yourexperience@nhs.net)

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